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RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY 4660

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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MLS AND DRL/AWH

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM VM](#)

SUBJECT: SOME ACTIVISTS PREVENTED FROM CELEBRATING DEATH ANNIVERSARY  
OF VETERAN DISSIDENT HOANG MINH CHINH

REF: A) HANOI 184 B) 07 HCMC 766

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In late March, Vietnamese police prevented democracy and land rights activists from attending a ceremony in Ho Chi Minh City to commemorate the death of Hanoi-based dissident and former General Secretary of the outlawed Democratic Party of Vietnam (DPV), Hoang Minh Chinh. Chinh died on February 7, and hundreds, including Embassy PolOff, attended his Hanoi funeral on February 16 (Ref A). The HCMC death anniversary ceremony, which was organized by the outlawed Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) monks at the request of Hoang Minh Chinh's relatives on the 49th day after his death, went ahead amid heavy police surveillance. UBCV's Venerable Thich Quang Do, a fierce GVN critic, was able to visit the ceremony undeterred. End summary.

#### A COMBINATION RELIGIOUS - POLITICAL EVENT

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¶2. (SBU) Venerable Thich Khong Tanh, a key UBCV member, told Post that Hoang Minh Chinh's children asked him to arrange the traditional forty-nine day death ceremony for their father at his pagoda in HCMC. In the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition, funerals will be followed with seven-day, forty-nine-day, one-hundred-day and yearly death anniversaries. Buddhist monks are often asked by the family to carry out these ceremonies. While a Buddhist tradition, this ceremony was also clearly political. Tanh said that the eldest daughter of Chinh, the late Secretary General of the Democratic Party of Vietnam (DPV), had invited DPV Deputy Secretary General Tran Khue and Bloc 8406 co-founder Do Nam Hai to the ceremony, scheduled on March 27. Other contacts said key members of the land rights movement were invited to the ceremony as well.

#### SOME PEOPLE STOPPED; SOME NOT

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¶3. (SBU) On March 27, plainclothes police stopped Do Nam Hai near his home as he was going to the ceremony. Hai reported to us that police forcibly took him to the police station for a "working session" that lasted eight hours. The police also searched his house and took all of his documents, computer, two cell phones and a printer while he was at the police station. Hai said the police did produce a search warrant and showed it to his relatives before conducting the search. Police also stopped DPV Deputy Secretary Tran Khue and his wife on their way to the pagoda, although his children had no problems attending the ceremony.

¶4. (SBU) While at least three members of the land rights movement were also barred from going to the pagoda, our sources in the UBCV said that Venerable Thich Quang Do was able to attend the death anniversary ceremony for about fifteen minutes. It is not clear whether GVN authorities intentionally allowed the Venerable Thich Quang Do to reach the ceremony or whether he

evaded his minders and "snuck out" of the monastery where he lives under virtual house arrest. In July 2007, Thich Quang Do claimed he was able to give his minders the slip when he met with land rights protesters in front of the National Assembly Southern office in HCMC (Ref B). Afterwards, Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Le Dung pointed to his presence at the protests as proof that Thich Quang Do's movements were not being restricted by authorities.

15. (SBU) The late Mr. Chinh's daughter confirmed to us that about twenty relatives of her family participated in the ceremony. Attendees said police surveillance during the HCMC ceremony was intense, with up to one hundred plainclothes policemen outside the pagoda and dozens inside filming the event. Contacts said land rights activists from the Central Highlands province of Lam Dong were allowed into the pagoda but those from Can Tho and Tien Giang were not.

#### COMMENT

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15. (SBU) Hoang Minh Chinh's legacy as a former Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) leader and French colonial war hero turned democracy activist makes events commemorating his death a natural rallying point for pro-democracy activists. While most of the leaders of Vietnam's nascent pro-democracy groups are either in jail, overseas or under virtual house arrest, networks live on. The UBCV remains as defiant as ever and Internet activists have recently come to the forefront, including groups and individuals highlighting issues ranging from anti-China to corruption in Vietnam. Hoang Minh Chinh's legacy has itself been the subject of numerous blog posts. End comment.

FAIRFAX